JOURNAL OF NEAR EASTERN STUDIES

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The *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* published its eighty-fourth volume this year. Continuing the earlier journal titles *Hebraica* (1884–95) and *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* (1895–1941), *JNES* has now presented 141 years of scholarly work altogether. The topical range of the journal has expanded far beyond the original 1880s focus on Semitics and Hebrew (which at that time meant only Biblical Hebrew) and now engages work on dozens of ancient and medieval language cultures. Yet the seed of wider study was already present in William Rainey Harper's 1884 inaugural essay, "The Purpose of *Hebraica*" (*Hebraica* 1, no. 1: 1–5), conjuring up the image of overworked ministers and professors everywhere who needed more context and guidance than translation work alone could provide. The "men who occupy the Old Testament chairs of our theological seminaries," Harper wrote, "cannot be professors of language merely." Stepping ever so gently on the accelerator, the author of the very next essay in that first issue—Hermann Strack, in "The Higher Criticism" (pp. 5–10)—pressed the case for interpretive work and admonished those who viewed critical engagement with scriptural texts as "a danger to the faith, and consequently by principle stand aloof from all such work." He urged them to make space for further thought and to accept a practice of critical reflection on the texts—a remonstration radical enough for the day.

Thus began the long journey from a nineteenth-century quarterly bulletin filled with two-page notices on "The Intermediate Syllable" and reviews of Hebrew–German dictionaries all the way to our twenty-first-century glossy, biannual journal, which ranges across many topics—this year, for example, Mesopotamian rituals for dealing with evil dreams, the evolution of Ṣūfī brotherhood lodges, and the Syriac letters of quarreling bishops. Much of the journal's development tracks closely with the general history of the "Orientalist" disciplines as they grew in number and diversified in nature, from divinity schools to history departments, from dictionary projects to the postwar years of foreign-language studies (adding Ottoman Turkish, Uzbek, Armenian, and others). But the process was hardly passive. The journal worked toward change: consider its two changes of title and focus; its ever-expanding publication of work in languages as varied as Soqotran, Geʿez, and Judeo-Arabic; its topics as assorted as protohistoric political identity, the existential commitments of Assyrian verbs, and the social location of Egyptian slaves as indicated by their personal names; and its inclusion of contributions in art history, comparative literature, and social history—fields of study that Harper's time did not countenance as part of the academic pantheon. The living tradition of research embodied in the pages of *JNES* recognizes the ancient and medieval worlds as profoundly mobile, diverse, polyglot, heterodox, and multicultural—underlying realities of the human past that no facile chauvinism can alter or deny. As much as times have changed, we will remain, with Harper, not "professors of language merely."

This year's issues of *JNES*—83, no. 2 (October 2024), and 84, no. 1 (April 2025)—contained fifteen articles and nineteen book reviews comprising 341 pages of published scholarly work. In addition to some of the topics mentioned above, these issues featured research on Kassite-period burial practices; the reconstruction of two Assyrian rituals of protection—one against Lamaštu, a demon, another against *Šurpu*, "Burning"; the history of the Syriac church in the transition period from late Byzantine to early Islamic times; the discursive context of Egyptian mural art; the personified attributes of Mesopotamian ritual kettledrums; the linguistic strategies of Judean mercenaries stationed in Achaemenid Egypt; and the literary allusions of Genesis 11:1–9 to Babylonian literature. Our Forum piece in *JNES* 84, no. 1 focused attention

on the role of humor in Mesopotamian schooling by tying literary varia about fart jokes and jesters' antics to issues of pedagogy and learning cognition in the Babylonian Eduba.

The journal received a slightly smaller set of submissions this year than it has in years past: sixty-seven new manuscripts were sent to us between July 1, 2024, and June 30, 2025. Several of them went through multiple rounds of review. Thirty-four full rounds of external review were completed, with an average of 2.3 reviewers per manuscript. The following chart outlines the status of these sixty-seven submissions at the end of the year (a count that excludes several manuscripts submitted prior to report year 2024–25 that were still under review or being revised).

Submissions with external review process	27
Accepted	10
Returned to author for minor revisions	3
Returned for major revisions	4
Rejected	6
Currently under review	4
Desk rejected	38
Withdrawn by the author	2

Our acceptance rate this year was thus 14.9 percent. For comparison, 2022–23 gave us seventy-six manuscripts and an acceptance rate of 17.1 percent; 2023–24 brought us seventy-one manuscripts and a 12.6 percent acceptance rate. Our time-to-decision remained prompt: external reviews of manuscripts submitted in 2024–25 were completed in an average of 52.7 days (7.5 weeks). Most accepted manuscripts were published within six months of decision, and none after more than twelve months. With the benefit of scholarly review and revision, our authors publish their work better and faster in *JNES* than in the supposedly "easier" outlets of workshop volumes and Festschrifts, which often take years to reach publication.

As ever, the work of the journal becomes meaningful and even possible only through the contributions of diverse and international readers, authors, and manuscript reviewers. *JNES* is accessible and read in virtually every country in the world. In 2024 alone, our top fifty articles of the past decade were accessed online more than 13,000 times; our worldwide citation score as calculated by Scopus has doubled since 2019. The scholars publishing in *JNES* come from all over the world: among the authors of articles, book reviews, and Forum comments this year, twenty-two worked at institutions in the United States, while nineteen others were in Israel (5), Germany (4), Iraq (3), the United Kingdom (2), Ireland (2), Türkiye, Spain, and the Netherlands (1 each). We depended on a similarly wide array of expertise in obtaining external evaluations of submitted work. Of the sixty-one external reviewers who completed manuscript evaluations, just over half (33) were based at institutions in the United States, while twenty-eight were in other countries, including Germany (8), the United Kingdom (4), Canada and Spain (3 each), Israel and Switzerland (2 each), and Bulgaria, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Qatar, and Türkiye (1 each).

Lest those lists look "US heavy," it is worth emphasizing that about half of these colleagues working in the United States come from other countries, and conversely about half of those working in other countries come from the United States. The broad strength of reciprocity in authorship and evaluation is striking: our scholarship relies on an exchange of ideas made possible only through an extensive network of international cooperation and dialogue. Harm done to these systems of interconnection by exclusion—whether by visa denial, academic boycott, or funding cutoff—does damage not just to this or that article, to one review or another, but to whole projects, working groups, and lineages of scholarship built up over decades. (We might remember here, by way of further example, that Chicago's Assyrian Dictionary project mostly relied on editors who came to the United States from other countries—Germany especially, but also Hungary,

Austria, Canada, Israel, Finland, the United Kingdom, Spain, the Netherlands, and Denmark. "Americans" were in the minority.)

Our academic institutions, networks, and traditions are highly dependent on governments for support. We are uniquely vulnerable to recissions, restrictions, and censorship. We are also uniquely equipped to work together. Mobilizing the legacies and living practices of international cooperation is essential to maintain the level of excellent work on which our readers rely.
